

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 28

MAY 8th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

I am glad that Sir Samuel Hoare has emphatically reasserted the Government's policy in regard to war against civilians. In his broadcast talk on April 27 he said, "We will not bomb open towns. We will not attempt to defeat Germany by terrorising their women and children." Let us hold fast to this, whatever the provocation.

## OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM

With our issue of April 24 more than a thousand subscriptions which had been made for six months fell due for renewal. We are encouraged by the large number of appreciative messages which have come with some 700 renewals already received (up to April 30). A remark typical of many others is: "I cannot say how much I owe personally to the News-Letter these last few months. It has given me new hope for the Church and for the world."

Three or four who did not renew their subscriptions gave as their reason that they found the outlook of the News-Letter too depressing. In so far as this criticism means that the News-Letter has not risen to the full heights of Christian faith, hope and courage, I have no wish to evade it, but rather to learn from it. At the same time it raises the problem which I have touched on before and which presses upon us all: What are the real grounds of Christian confidence? It is precisely in relation to such a situation as the present that Christianity has something vital to say.

Outside of Christianity men have inclined to one of two contrasted attitudes. They have either fallen into a complete pessimism, seeing life as futile and meaningless. (Last week's Supplement pointed out that throughout history many of the wisest minds have tended to this view.) Or, alternatively, men have sought encouragement in an optimism which ignores or minimises the evil, suffering and trial which belong to our human lot. This attitude has been dominant during the past two centuries. But in contrast with both these attitudes there is found in Christ, and in those who learn from Him, a unique combination of understanding and acceptance of the mystery of human suffering with a calm assurance of victory and triumphant joy.

Many people think that they can believe in God only if He seems to be backing what in their eyes are right causes. But this is just what very often He seems not to do. The Bible is full of the deepest religious insights, and God is described in it as a God who *hides* Himself. The writers of the Bible did not believe in Him because they found in nature and history evidence of His working. On the contrary, they brought a belief in Him to the interpretation of nature and history. Because their faith was not reached by reflection on the course of events, it could not be upset by them. Their

assurance remained unshaken in the face of trial and disaster. History teaches us that it has often been when earthly prospects seemed most dark that faith in God has been most assured.

There is nothing Christian about the common understanding of "God's in His heaven ; all's right with the world." The Christian attitude is rather, "Because the world is very far wrong, God came to redeem it." The ground of Christian confidence is that there has been manifested in history a human goodness which enables us to believe that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, there is *love* at the heart of things. Christ brings us the assurance that there is an infinite forgiveness overshadowing the life of men and an infinite mercy on which we may cast ourselves. If we believe that, we can freely allow Life and whatever it brings to be our teacher, knowing that all is safe in the hands of One whom we can absolutely trust. Christ promises not to remove the things which we fear but to deliver us from our fear of them. He teaches us to see everything in a new light by taking us into, what last week's Supplement called, "a new dimension of existence."

## THE WAR AS JUDGMENT

What is the bearing of this on the present war situation? From the religious standpoint the agony through which the world is passing is the judgment of God on Western civilisation for its refusal to seek the true ends of man and society. The judgment of God is a searching and terrible thing, and we seek every excuse for evading it. We evade it when we say, "This war is a result of an evil spirit in Germany ; let us defeat and crush that evil force and things will come right." I believe, differing in this point from some of you, that the soul-destroying doctrines which are in the ascendant in Germany must be resisted by force. But let us not delude ourselves. The effort and sacrifice will be in vain if we make this necessity an excuse for unwillingness to submit both our individual lives and our national life to the severity of God's judgment. Even if we win the war, the day of reckoning will be only postponed.

Cardinal Faulhaber, the Archbishop of Munich, has issued an outspoken pastoral in which he fearlessly reiterates and emphasises the truths set forth in the recent papal encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*. "When the natural moral law is denied and rejected," he declares, "darkness descends on the earth."

The same interpretation of present events is the theme of the recent small volume by my colleague, A. R. Vidler, *God's Judgment on Europe* (Longmans, 4s.). Western man, dazzled by his new powers, has forgotten his dependence on God and believed that he could make a satisfying world guided by his own values and relying on his own resources. Europe has preferred material to spiritual ends. It has refused to acknowledge any binding spiritual authority, and is thus left without an overarching principle to hold the nations together. Having lost the unifying power of a moral and spiritual faith, Western civilisation is dissolving in the clash of irreconcilable national egoisms.

The situation has been brought about by the pursuit of false values for many generations. We are all entangled in the web of a common life, and the individual is powerless to effect any immediate remedy. There is no easy and quick way of escape, much as we long for it. I was present a short while ago at a small meeting of influential laymen, at which an opinion was expressed that nothing would solve our difficulties but the emergence of a prophet like John Wesley. We do indeed need the voice of prophecy, but we must beware of looking to it as a miraculous release from our problems. We are tempted to look for something that will save us from the painful

process of allowing our third-rate selves to be changed into something radically different. But there is no escaping this necessity. If our values are false, things will never be right till we set ourselves to seek the true ends of life. Seen in this light our trials are a manifestation not only of God's judgment but of His mercy. Through suffering He is calling us back to the true meaning of life.

## TWO POSSIBILITIES

In the light of the wide sweep of history and of what has happened to other civilisations, we can see that there are two possibilities. We may be enabled by God's grace to make an adequate response to the challenge. Repentance may be sufficiently deep and wide to make it possible to build civilisation on true foundations. For this we must strive as long as any hope remains. But history teaches also that the challenge may be refused. Or those who accept it may be too small a minority to influence the course of events; if so, they must recognise that fact. This need not be a policy of defeatism but a wise strategy based on an understanding and trustful acceptance of God's working in history. The writers of the two papers in *Christendom*, on which I commented in C.N.-L. No. 24, have written to me denying that a policy of temporary retreat for the purpose of recovering the true values of life is necessarily a surrender of the sphere of public life to satanic forces. It may mean only that of the alternative practical policies which command public support none deal radically enough with what in the Christian view are the real evils. If there is no fundamental change of heart, then the best intentioned efforts, such as the attempt to create a democracy based on the needs of the common man, or Mr. H. G. Wells' World-State, or plans for Federal Union, will only postpone the final judgment on our refusal to seek the true ends of man's nature. In that case all that is left for Christians to do is to offer their strongest resistance to the spread of a standardised mass-mentality. The policy may be compared to that of the inhabitants of an invaded country who are compelled to retire to the hills and carry on guerilla warfare until the wheel of fortune turns and an inner weakening of the dominant power opens the way to a renaissance.

But even if things should become worse before they can become better, there is no reason to lose heart. We can still share in the purpose which God is working out in judgment and in mercy. Our lives and acts, offered to Him, can still contribute to the realisation of that purpose.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

This brings us back to the question which more than any other crops up in our correspondence—what can we do? It is pressed on me with great earnestness in a letter received last week from one of our members who is a friend of many years. It is never absent from my mind. The only contribution which I wish to make now is one that may help us to distinguish two answers at different levels.

If the life of every individual, as well as every period of history, is immediately open to God, there is no situation in which we cannot do His will. Every morning when we wake there are duties to be done. We can always do the next thing as an offering to God. All around us there are people in need of help. Life brings us daily opportunities of being brave, patient, kind; of resisting the pressure of standardisation and of living adventurously; of bringing about the marriage of some ideal with some fidelity, courage and endurance,—in which, as William James said, the solid meaning of life consists.

But while that is eternally true and can be our stay when all else fails, the passionate inquiry, What can we do? points to more than this. What those who ask it want to know is what we can do in order to save society from disaster. They have no wish to be saved alone, leaving the rest to their fate. What they are seeking is to share in some collective action which offers hope of changing society.

It is just to this question that what has been said in earlier paragraphs relates. It is possible that there is no *immediate* way of changing the situation fundamentally. To say, "There *must* be some way out because the situation is desperate" is a demand that the universe should conform to our wishes. But the starting-point of religion is not striving but *acceptance*. We cannot force God's hand. If certain processes have to work themselves out to the end we must patiently bide His time. Premature attempts to compel events into a pattern of our own making are doomed to frustration and disappointment.

But we have also to be ready. "In an hour that ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." At any moment God's redemptive purpose may be disclosed in ways that it is beyond our power to foresee.

I am in touch with some of those who are thinking hard about the ways in which we can move forward together. Just as quickly as light comes and ideas take shape, we shall put them before you.

## THE SUPPLEMENT

The writer of the Supplement this week is the Rev. J. Z. Hodge, who has been for more than ten years the secretary of the National Christian Council in India, and for many years before that a missionary in that country. He is exceptionally fitted to take a wide view of the Indian situation from the Christian standpoint.

## COST OF POSTAGE

With the help of those of you who have written to us, we are carefully considering the difficult problem that has been raised for the C.N.L. by the increased cost of postage. A decision will be reached and announced as soon as possible. Meanwhile, it will be a help if members who write to us will kindly enclose a contribution towards the cost of answering some of the many letters of comment which we receive.

Yours sincerely,

*Dr. Oldham*

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**Subscriptions.**—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 10s. (\$3 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 5s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months.

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*The Supplement*  
No. 28

## CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA: A WAR-TIME VIEW

There is little in the Indian scene to suggest that the world is at war. The business of life goes on as usual. The pedestrian passes on his way undisturbed by black-outs and such-like contrivances. Municipalities, district boards and legislative assemblies discuss affairs of State and Province accompanied by "walk outs" and other manifestations of democracy as in pre-war days. Trains and buses run with the same varying degrees of punctuality and over-crowding. Dearness of living, indicated by a perceptible rise of 10 per cent., occasions a strike here and there, but food supplies are plentiful and rationing is not in practice. Flag-waving is conspicuously absent, and when the drums beat they call to marriage feast, funeral pyre or religious observance. Passions are inflamed and end in vigorous rioting, not because of indignities heaped on Poland and Finland by arrogant dictators, but by the uprising of some old feud between Hindu and Muslim, or the revival of an old quarrel between landlord and tenant. Our not infrequent strikes and revolts against authority, while they may reveal the hand of Moscow, are mainly of local interpretation. No serious dislocation in Church and Mission work is manifest, and committees and conferences show little diminution either in number or in enthusiasm. Yet it would be a profound mistake to conclude that India is indifferent to what is happening in distant Europe. Nowhere does the radio receive a more attentive hearing and nowhere does the tragic course

of world affairs arouse deeper concern. Some see in all this the approaching end of "imperialism"; but most see in it a grave menace to democracy and the rights of smaller nations.

### INDIA AND DEMOCRACY

India has little use for Hitlerism. Some of her citizens, wearied by the multiplicity of leaders and the constant clash of conflicting views, may sigh with uncompromising spirits in the student world for the intervention of the strong man armed who will unite a divided nation and lead it to victory; but that is not the common mood. India is not prepared to bid good-bye to democracy, and the dictators may rest assured that, come what may, she will stand fast by Parliamentary government. In this faith is to be understood her plea for a "constituent assembly" to determine her future, a proposal concerning which there is much debate. British India was grieved and her self-respect touched to the quick when the British Empire embarked on war without taking her into its inner counsels. In the new world order for which the Allies are fighting, India naturally desires to know where she will come in; but, however much we may regret that she did not see her way, as the native States did, to offer unconditional assistance to Great Britain in this life and death struggle, we need have no doubt where her sympathies

lie. The pity is that Britain and India do not always use the same vernacular. Happily, Mr. Gandhi still reigns in Sevagram, and in Delhi we have a Viceroy who knows both his Britain and his India, and in whose sincerity and sagacity good citizens generally have complete confidence. That a way out of the present tangle will be found we do not doubt; and we should not be surprised if it be the way of faith. We should be surprised if it be the way of isolation.

### THE CHURCH IS HERE

No more significant sign marks the Indian scene than the emergence of the Church of Christ. It is here, and it has come to stay. Busy nation builders who set themselves to shape things to come in India, even to the extent of carving out new kingdoms within its spacious realm, find little place for the Christian Church in the new order they contemplate. This is not surprising, for India is in large measure the heritage of Hindu and Muslim, and six million Christians in a population of three hundred and fifty millions is a very small drop in a very large bucket. But did not the Master speak the parable of the leaven and the lump? That the Church is here, and growing rapidly in numbers, dignity and influence, is evident. In the last decade its numerical increase exceeded that of any other religious group save the Sikhs, and many who read the signs of the times think the coming census will record a still higher rate of progress. It was fitting that the World Missionary Conference of December, 1938, should come to India, and the success that attended that historic gathering in the new home of the Madras Christian College at Tambaram was in no small measure due to the beauty of its setting and the stimulus of a growing indigenous Church.

If it be asked, How is the Church in

India growing?, the answer that comes most readily and convincingly is the familiar word of Scripture—"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." The growth of the Church in India can only be understood on the assumption that the Spirit of God is active on these throbbing human plains, speaking to, and awakening, the spirit that is in man; for while the Church is built of human materials its builder and maker is always God. But the Spirit lays hold of human occasions to achieve His ends, and among such may be mentioned the dawning sense of manhood among what are popularly called the depressed classes, the awakening of tribal consciousness among aboriginal peoples, the liberating of mind and will by the national movement, and the new resolve with which the Christian forces are giving themselves to the unfinished evangelistic task. Since the Church still draws its membership largely from the lower orders of society, to whom bread and butter is ever a primary consideration, it has to face the charge of proselytising; but it is worthy of note that the force of the charge is lessening. Two good reasons account for this: Christian methods are more open to the searchlight of criticism than formerly, and the dignity of human personality with its right to unfettered choice is now generally recognised. Those familiar with the signals see in the national awakening a highway for the Gospel and, while alive to a definite revolt against religion in certain areas of thought and action, discover in the perplexity of neutral thinkers a growing desire for some sure word of prophecy that will stay the mind and satisfy the heart. The Church in India holds that word and is not afraid to speak it. Without apology and reservation it has affirmed that its supreme task is evangelism.

## GERMAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

The Tambaram Conference revealed the reality of the ecumenical Christian fellowship and laid upon its delegates the solemn charge of maintaining it. The delegates from India little dreamed that within a few months this fellowship, so wonderfully manifested and so highly prized, would be subjected to the fiery ordeal of a world war. But the crisis found the Church ready, and the part it took in conserving the work of the German missions, from which, for a time, the men missionaries were removed, will form a kindling page when the Christian history of these troubled times comes to be written. The story can be shortly and simply told. Immediately on the outbreak of war all German male missionaries, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, were interned, and to the National Christian Council and the Roman Catholic Church authorities fell the responsibility of seeing that their work was conserved. It was the express wish of the Government of India that mission work should be adequately cared for, and to this end it invited the co-operation of the National Christian Council. The Protestant missions affected were the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chota Nagpur and Assam, the Schleswig-Holstein mission in Orissa, the Leipzig mission in South India and the Basel mission on the Malabar Coast. With the ready and effective help of the Federation of Lutheran Churches, the provincial Christian Councils, neighbouring missions, individual missionaries and Church leaders, together with the friendly co-operation of Government, satisfactory interim arrangements were made and the work suffered little interruption. Within a few months practically all the interned missionaries were released, and it is worthy

of note that the only pledge they were asked to give was an undertaking to do nothing to the prejudice of the British Government in India. This compromised neither their religious nor their national allegiance.

Throughout these difficult days the Government of India acted justly and generously. It made provision for the maintenance of wives and children, and appointed a Commission to investigate each case under the chairmanship of Sir Malcolm Darling, a distinguished public servant whose wise and sympathetic handling of the delicate business entrusted to him won the respect of all. The release of the missionaries brought with it the problem of their support, as well as that of their work, and when the National Christian Council met in Nagpur at the close of 1939, this subject occupied a central place in its thinking and planning. No financial support was forthcoming from Germany. Government, while prepared to continue its aid for educational and philanthropic purposes, could not be expected to support foreign missionaries from public funds. Repatriation presented peculiar difficulties and its wide employment could not be entertained. Churches and missions were themselves facing formidable measures of retrenchment, and individual Christians were groaning under increased taxation and other inhibitions, but the Council felt that the support of the released missionaries entrusted to them was a debt of Christian honour that could be met only by an appeal to Christian liberality.

On the basis of a carefully prepared estimate by the Executive Council of the Federation of Lutheran Churches in India, it was agreed in consultation with the Federation to sponsor an appeal for Rs. 130,000. Since the missions directly concerned were of the Lutheran persuasion, primacy in rendering help natur-

ally fell to their denominational brethren, and prompt steps were at once taken by the World Convention of Lutheran Churches to render all possible assistance. This is co-operation of the best quality. But the Christian forces face an obligation here that carries beyond denominational and racial frontiers. While the Churches in America could be trusted to bear the lion's share of this Christian giving and the hard-pressed Churches in Great Britain and the Continent to do what in them lay, the National Christian Council felt that in this emergency lay a clear call to the Christian generosity of India. The splendid contribution of Rs. 20,000 made by India towards the expenses of the Tambaram Conference was recalled and the Council was encouraged to ask an offering of at least Rs. 10,000. The response was immediate and gratifying, and yet not surprising, for the Church

is not unmindful of the magnificent service German missionaries have given to the cause of Christ in India. To them we owe some of the greatest pages in the history of Christian Missions in India, and we will not forget.

Addressing the recent Triennial Meeting of the National Christian Council its President, the Bishop of Dornakal, described the Council in an inspired phrase as "a Fellowship for the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ." These difficult and dangerous days are days of opportunity as well as crisis, and they recall the Council and the Churches it represents to the supreme task of evangelism; they also lay upon all Christian people a solemn charge to maintain inviolate the ecumenical Christian fellowship so nobly sustained by C. F. Andrews, whose death a few days back made all India mourn.

J. Z. HODGE.

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#### BOUND VOLUMES

A limited number of copies of Nos. 0 to 26 of the Christian News-Letter, bound in an attractive green cloth with gold lettering and a full index, are available. The cost until the end of May will be 8s. 6d. post free.

We can also arrange for members' copies to be bound for them. The cost of binding the 26 issues in paper boards with coloured lettering and supplying an index will be 2s. 6d. post free. Members' sets should reach us before the 31st May, accompanied by a remittance. We are prepared to supply missing issues at 3d. each, except Nos. 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, which are out of print. Owing to the difficulty of paper supplies we cannot reprint back numbers.

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